

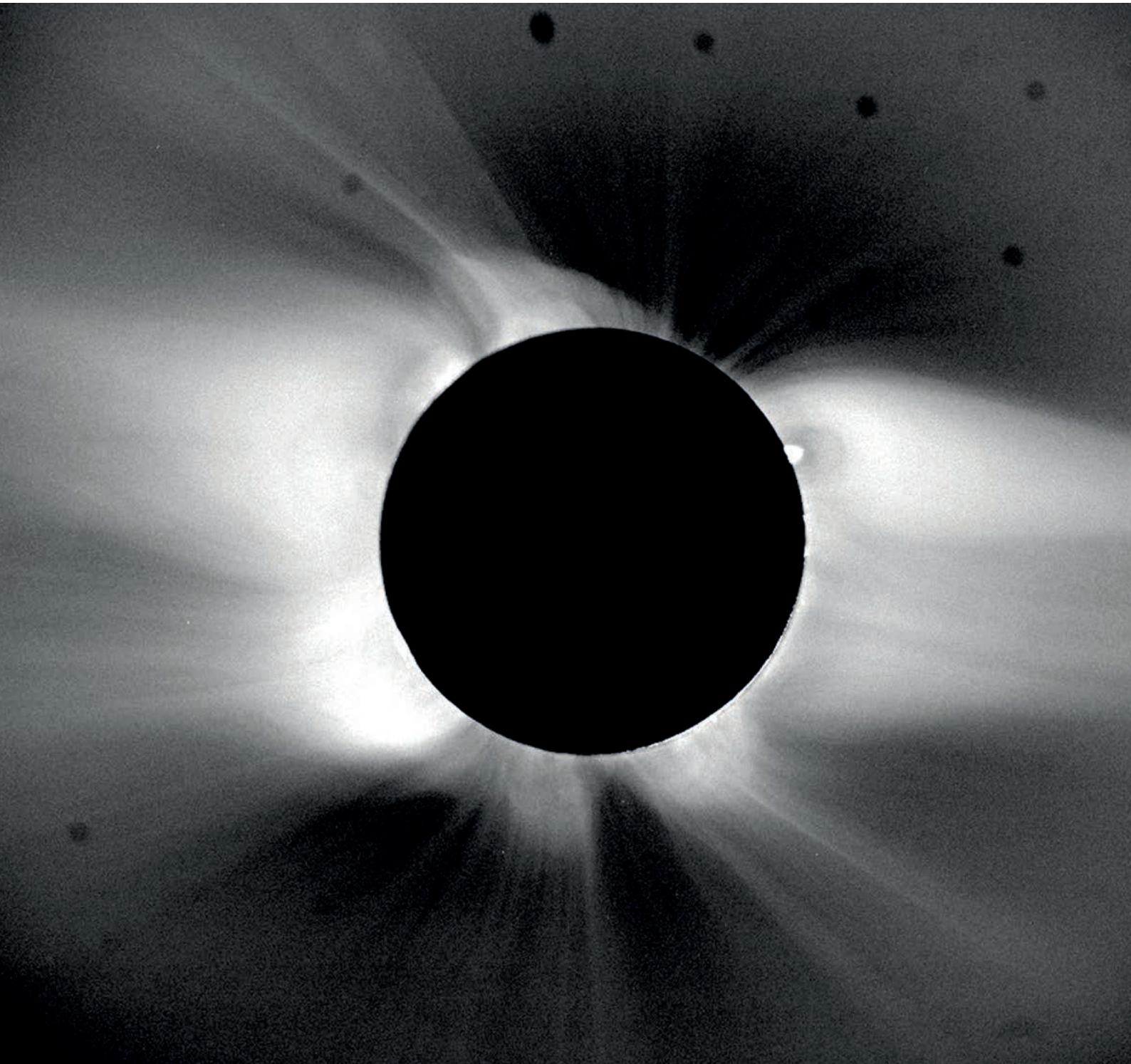
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EDITOVANÉ ČÍSLO O FOTOGRAFII A VĚDĚ / SPECIAL ISSUE ON PHOTOGRAPHY IN SCIENCE  
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# Photographers in the Museum: French Anthropology and the Aesthetics of Images (1930–1950)

While at the beginning of the twentieth century, in line with the previous century dominated by the scientific paradigm coming from Western natural sciences, photography was still used as a collecting and documenting tool in anthropology, in the interwar period the status and value of photographs taken in the field and depicting cultures and people from other parts of the world became more complex: not only were they used as educational tools, but they were also valued for their aesthetic qualities.

The public and educational role of museums was reactivated in the 1920s,<sup>1</sup> which led some ethnographic museums to consider photographs as documents to be accumulated, spread through scholarly anthropology networks, and displayed to the general public.<sup>2</sup> The Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro in France (I refer to it as the 'Trocadéro' throughout the paper), created in 1878<sup>3</sup> and reorganized from 1928, under the supervision of Paul Rivet and Georges Henri Rivièrè, participated in this turn. To give more weight to popular education, Rivet and Rivièrè turned the outdated museum, which kept 'bric-à-brac', into a rationalized, modern institution.<sup>4</sup> For this purpose, they relied on photographs, which they displayed in both permanent and temporary exhibitions. This trend, initiated during the 1930s at the Trocadéro, was continued in the following decades at the Musée de l'Homme, which was built at the time of the 1937 World's Fair in Paris to replace the Trocadéro.

The pedagogical role of photographs was also articulated with an aesthetical appreciation of photography and recognition of the photographers as authors. This coincided with the rise of the photojournalist, whose images — printed as well as exhibited — combined social and political significance with an attention to aesthetic quality (composition, light,

etc.). Inspired by these developments, Rivet and Rivièrè sought to legitimize an aesthetic approach to photography at the Trocadéro, thus durably shaping the museum and scientific practices of French anthropology. As I will show in this essay, recognizing photographers' work and assuming the value of their production in the museum went so far as to influence the way anthropologists considered their own photographs and exhibited them in museums. The choices made by the museum staff, the networks used, the way photographs were exhibited and also the formats: these aspects, in addition to comments by journalists at the time, were all indications of the status and role granted to photography.

There are many gaps in the history of photographs that have been used in museum exhibition spaces<sup>5</sup> either as the focus of displays or 'in the background'.<sup>6</sup> This article proposes bringing to light one aspect of this history; it seeks to emphasize the specific way in which French anthropology, which had become a highly visual scientific discipline, engaged with images. I will first underline the importance the Trocadéro's staff gave to the aesthetic value of images and to the work of photographers, both amateurs and professionals (or those in the process of becoming professionals); it appears in particular through a series of photographic exhibitions organized between 1932 and 1935. These events initiated collaboration with photographers, in particular those from the Alliance Photo agency, which soon intensified and took on a formal dimension through the design of the new rooms at the Musée de l'Homme (1937–1938). This attention to images displayed in the museum's galleries continued after World War II, when visual works by certain anthropologists were exhibited in large formats never seen before in the museum (1941–1946).

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1 / Hugo Paul Herdeg, *Indochine. Vitrine et Panneaux. Musée de l'Homme*

(showcase and panels), 1939

nitrate film negative, 6 × 6 cm

Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, PF0016084

Photo © RMN – Grand Palais / Hugo Paul Herdeg

### Organizing 'photography exhibitions' at the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro (1932-1935)

Though photography aroused little interest at the Trocadéro at the end of the nineteenth century, it became part of the new ecosystem formed at this museum after 1928. The director Paul Rivet and the deputy director

Georges Henri Rivière even more so were fully convinced of the importance and value of photography for museum work, researchers, and the public. Among the 'Friends of the Museum' they succeeded in rallying, and whose financial support was essential for the museum's renewal, was Alexandre Bungener who provided funding support for photography and made it possible to launch the museum's Photographic Service and photo library?

The photographic policy they promoted took three main paths. First, consistent with the collection paradigm that had shaped anthropology since the last quarter of the previous century,<sup>8</sup> one aspect of this policy consisted in collecting and organizing numerous photographic images as documentation.<sup>9</sup> It benefited from the new attention French ethnographers paid to photographing in the field at that time.<sup>10</sup> Second, Rivet and Rivière also drew inspiration from visual practices already common in fine arts museums: many photographs were produced to depict the items in the Trocadéro's collections, to be used by staff and curators or printed as postcards.<sup>11</sup> Third, photography also embodied, to them, a major tool for the popular education policy they aspired to implement at the museum, which would ideally be dedicated to the general public. Here, they were in line with a leitmotif expressed at the end of the nineteenth century and revived during the interwar period: the use of appropriate visual elements and effects would allow direct legibility and thus a better understanding of what the museum sought to teach. It would be more democratic: through photographs, one seeks to 'speak to the eyes.'<sup>12</sup> Thanks to his readings and travels,<sup>13</sup> Rivière was fully aware of the role this way of thinking played in the renewal of several museums at that time and drew on it for shaping the new Trocadéro.

Under Rivière, photographs indeed did take up more space in the museum's public areas. On the one hand, they were part of temporary exhibitions showing the results of ethnographic expeditions, and were exhibited along with the objects collected on such endeavours. Sometime dozens or even hundreds of such items would be displayed, such as at the exhibition dedicated to Edgar Aubert de la Rüe's expedition to Vanuatu.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, photographs were also an essential element of the museographical conception Rivière developed at this time. He outlined his ambitions in an article published in *Figaro esthétique* in 1931: 'We will show these objects, in our future rooms of the Trocadéro, with the maximum of documentation [...]. This musical instrument, a photograph will show it to you in use, a musical stave will give you the extent of it, a nearby record will make you hear its sound.'<sup>15</sup> More than other devices, it was photographs that found the main place in the new design of the rooms.<sup>16</sup> In 1932 Rivière insisted in his 'Principes de muséographie' on the role of these images in the museum's public space: they were to 'show the objects being used.' Besides displaying photographs in the museum's permanent exhibit, a practice still in use in the following decades at the Musée de l'Homme, the Trocadéro also launched a series of temporary photography exhibitions. Presenting these events as dedicated to the work of one photographer, whose name was often mentioned in the title, conveyed even more clearly the value attributed to photographs at the museum.

From 1932 to 1935, ten photography exhibitions were presented at the Trocadéro. After the first exhibition of a set of photographs taken by Odette Arnaud in Dominica

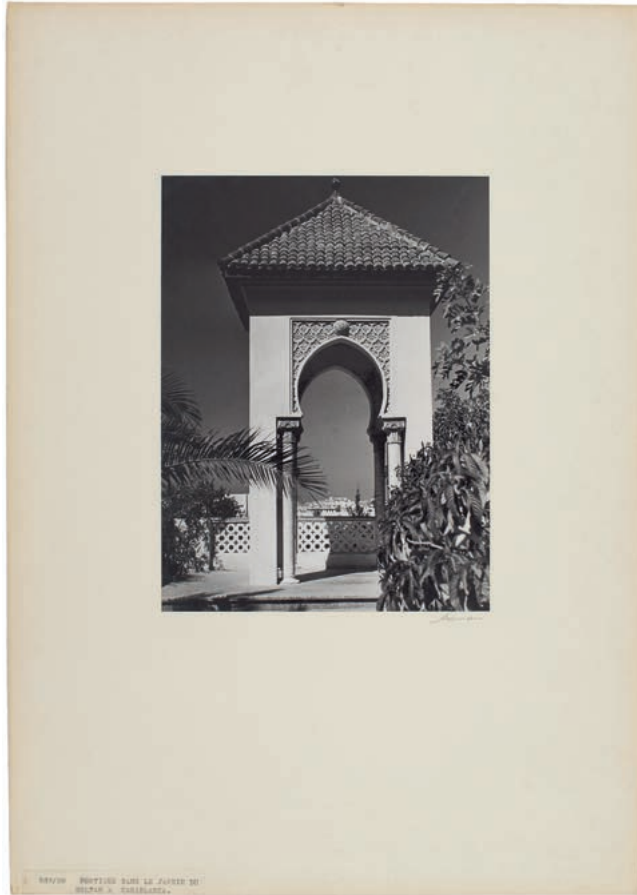
(1932), photographs taken in Kafiristan by Raymond Burnier and Alain Daniélou (June 1933) were displayed. In 1934, the series continued: one could see displayed, sometimes simultaneously, the exhibition *En Asie centrale: photographies de la mission Ella Maillart* (January), the photographs of Pierre Verger at *Photographie de la Polynésie française* (May), of Titaïna at *Peuples et Magies de l'Océan Indien* (June) or the exhibition *Rivages de la mer Rouge. Photographies d'Henry de Monfreid* (November). In 1935, four new exhibitions took place featuring the work of another four photographers: René Zuber (*En Crète sans les dieux*, January), Raymond Plion (*Siam*, April), Edmond Demaître (*New Guinea*, May), and André Steiner (*Morocco*, April). The dynamic stopped then due to the planned demolition of the Trocadéro, which led to the creation of the Musée de l'Homme.

Most of these exhibitions left aside ethnographic objects to show only photographs. The exhibitions usually brought together numerous images: for example, sixty were displayed at Pierre Verger's exhibition, 150 at Titaïna's, and even 200 for Ella Maillart's. Each photograph was exhibited alone and was probably mounted on cardboard. The vintage prints from Steiner's exhibition show the materiality of the pictures displayed. [2, 3] His black-and-white photographs taken in Morocco were commissioned by the French colonial ministry.<sup>17</sup> The prints on display at the museum were about 30 × 20 cm and were fitted on large boards measuring more than 60 × 40 cm. A large clear space was thus left around the photographs themselves, where nothing else appeared but a short caption in the lower left corner and Steiner's signature just below the print. This way to display photographs differed from the process advocated by Rivière for permanent rooms. For the exhibition of Henri de Monfreid's pictures, there were plans to add 'some silhouettes of large size.'<sup>18</sup> An interest in larger formats is already evident here, which, as we shall see, was reaffirmed in the early 1940s.

These exhibitions brought to the fore photographs and systematically associated them with one singular author. The museum's strategy for choosing these photographers was twofold. On the one hand, it relied on a network of well-known travellers, reporters, or writers who frequently published in the press, such as Henri de Monfreid, Titaïna, and Ella Maillart — and to some extent Odette Arnaud. Through applying this strategy, the museum could attract a larger audience and gain a wider following. On the other hand, the museum promoted young, almost unknown photographers, and sought to give them a place on the photography scene, which was quite dynamic in Paris at that time. This was the case of the already-mentioned Steiner; Raymond Burnier, a Swiss photographer who was only twenty-one years old in 1933; and Pierre Verger and René Zuber, who both participated to the creation of the Alliance Photo agency in 1934. These young men were building their names as photographers, and the Trocadéro, to which Verger was already close, thus contributed to their

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2 / **André Steiner, Portique dans le jardin du Sultan à Casablanca (Portico in the Sultan's garden in Casablanca)**, 1933

silver print on cardboard, 22,7 × 30 cm (cardboard 62 × 44 cm)

Musée Nicéphore Niépce, Chalon-sur-Saône

Photo: André Steiner, musée Nicéphore Niépce, Ville de Chalon-sur-Saône

renown. For the Trocadéro and for Rivière, exhibiting these photographers was also a way to capitalize on the appeal of photography as a modern visual tool at that time, which was reflected in particular in the rise of the illustrated press. The museum could thus become an actor on the Parisian photographic scene.<sup>19</sup>

Although the exhibitions highlighted the photographs and, through their museum setting, proposed taking an aesthetic approach toward them, photography's documentary dimension was not minimized. In the Trocadéro spirit, endorsed by ethnographers at the time, aesthetic and documentary values did not contradict each other, but on the contrary, they went hand in hand. One of the main French ethnographers, who was close to the museum, Marcel Griaule, explained in 1935 how several ways of looking at a photograph could be combined. He wrote the following lines about photographs to be published in a new magazine, *Atlas*, which never came out: *'The photographs that will accompany the text will not be just a pretext for dreaming, a mere pleasure for the eye: they will have a technical value [...], a scientific value. Where the amateur will only see a well-profiled rider on a dune, ready for unreal gallops, the specialist will detail the bit or the rump. One man's peaceful rural scene is another man's agricultural work for another. One man's painting is another man's reference.'*<sup>20</sup>

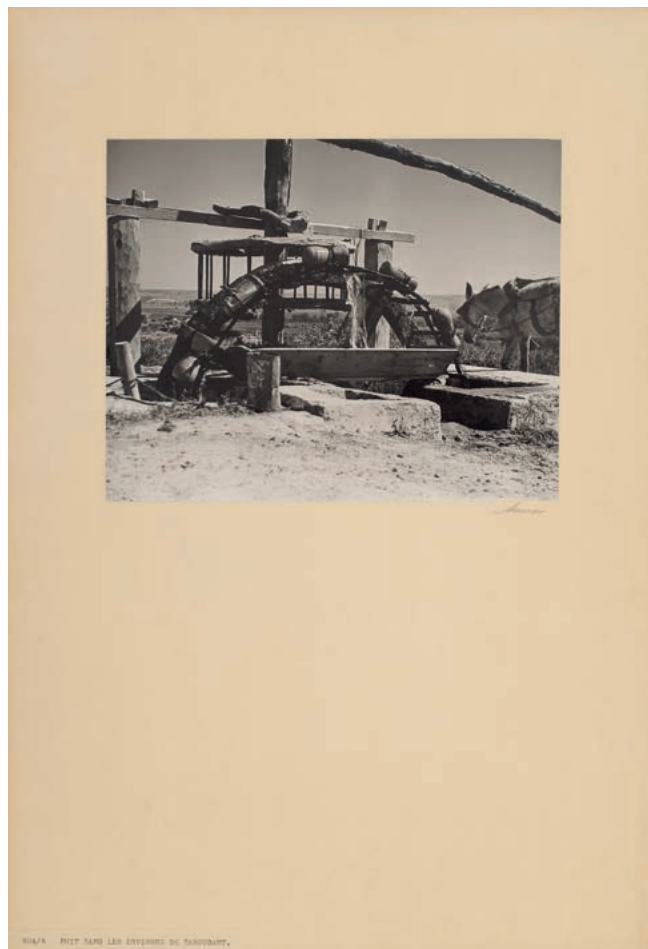
Griaule underlined here how even aesthetically pleasing photographs could be objects of scientific analysis.

The photography exhibitions, in which images were captioned, sought to achieve the same kind of synthesis. Their successful combination of aesthetic and documentary values could be read about in short articles published in the press. For example, writing about Verger's exhibition, one commentator noted that the photographs 'have been taken with as much concern for documentation as for art.'<sup>21</sup> For other authors, Ella Maillart's photographs were 'both documentaries and real small paintings,'<sup>22</sup> as were Titaÿna's images, which 'constitute[d] an artistic and ethnographic document of incomparable interest.'<sup>23</sup> The museum thus not only promoted the use of photography for documentary purposes, but also valued images with aesthetic qualities, especially those of photographers. This gesture continued with the opening of the Musée de l'Homme a few years later and even seemed to shape the relationship that a new generation of anthropologists had with photographic practice.

### Photojournalists' images in the permanent rooms (1938-1939)

The photographic exhibitions of the early 1930s initiated fruitful collaboration with young professional photographers that continued after the opening of the Musée de l'Homme, built in 1937, where the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro had stood. Ethnology gave a new lease on life to this museum, dedicated to both the natural and cultural dimensions of humankind, in line with the wishes of its director Paul Rivet.<sup>24</sup> Consistent with the ideals of popular education, its interior layout and galleries were clearly designed to meet the expectations of the general public, which was still a priority: photographs played a key role here in implementing the new educational aspirations. The museum staff took up the idea of including photographs in the museography, in the showcases surrounding objects, and on information panels, which had already been tried and tested at the Trocadéro and since the nineteenth century in other museums, as well.<sup>25</sup> Although this general museographic principle was relatively common, the Musée de l'Homme's staff set up a real protocol to define the way photographs should be used. Great attention was then paid to these photographs' materiality in the lines devoted to them in the 'Instructions for the Presentation of Collections', an internal document published in February 1938.<sup>26</sup>

The second part of this document is devoted to photographs. It mentions several issues, such as the supports on which photographs can be presented



3 / **André Steiner, Puits dans les environs de Taroudant (Wells in the Taroudant area), 1933**

silver print on cardboard, 23,2 × 30 cm (cardboard 62 × 44 cm)  
Musée Nicéphore Niépce, Chalon-sur-Saône

Photo: André Steiner, musée Nicéphore Niépce, Ville de Chalon-sur-Saône

titles and texts in the rooms had undoubtedly been harmonized, the way the captions were presented was carefully thought out, too. The document states that photograph captions on general panels should be printed, whereas others needed to be ‘typed, with a large-font machine, on narrow special white paper strips, the length of the photograph.’ It also discusses the left margin size, alignment type, and so forth. The instructions also state that the ‘origin of the photograph’ should be systematically mentioned in the captions. In line with what was done at the Trocadéro, the Musée de l’Homme staff indeed sought to recognize and enhance the role of the photographers. We have shown this by analysing the photo library policy of the museum during the same period:<sup>27</sup> this attention was manifested even in the public rooms in which the photographers’ names appear.

To set up the visual part of the museography, the museum’s staff first used materials from the photographic archives assembled by the museum — as was the case at the Galerie d’Anthropologie (anthropological gallery) —<sup>28</sup> but they also called on contemporary photographers, in particular those affiliated with Alliance Photo. [4] This photo agency, established in December 1934 (and whose activities ended in 1939 due to the war), was one of the first to take on young photographers who demanded their author status be recognized and who asserted their rights in the media system.<sup>29</sup> Photographs by two of the agency’s members, Pierre Verger and René Zuber, had already been displayed at photographic exhibitions at the Trocadéro, mentioned above. Collaboration continued with the introduction of some pictures by Alliance Photo photographers in the permanent rooms of the Musée de l’Homme.

From April 1937 to November 1938, several museum members corresponded with Maria Eisner (also named Marie-Jeanne Eisner), a photographer and Alliance Photo’s founder and administrator.<sup>30</sup> When Georges Henri Rivière left the Musée de l’Homme to implement a new museum project dedicated to French folklore,<sup>31</sup> Eisner corresponded with several museum’s members from different Departments. Beside Denise Paulme, Robert Gessain, Paule le Scour, and Jacques Soustelle, it was above all Heinz Lehmann (sometimes referred to by the first name of Henri) and Thérèse Rivière, who most frequently corresponded with Eisner. The former, affiliated with the Department of America, was also an amateur photographer. Thérèse Rivière, Georges Henri’s sister, was a very active photographer when conducting fieldwork.<sup>32</sup> She implemented the first photo library at the Trocadéro<sup>33</sup> and participated in setting up of the North Africa Section at the Musée de l’Homme. The letters show that the museum’s

(showcases or panels), the number of pictures expected on each one, the formats, if they must be displayed alone or in series, what they should depict according to their location, and so forth. For instance, for ‘general panels’ presented at the entrance of each gallery, the instructions distinguish three types of photographs that compose them: the ‘main one’ in ‘large formats’ (up to 40 × 50 cm) and which should show a ‘general aspect, preferably a landscape’; the ‘second format’ one (30 × 40 or 40 × 40 cm), which must be placed below to show ‘for example a human being’; and a series of ‘third-order’ format pictures (three or four images, 24 × 30 cm) without a precise topic to depict. This protocol was indeed applied in the rooms, as shown in the photographs taken at that time. [1] For special showcases and panels, the document again distinguishes three formats (large, medium, small), but the largest prints can be up to 60 × 60 cm and the smallest, displayed in series, cannot exceed 13 × 18 cm.

These instructions aimed to harmonize the museographic choices made by each department and give a strong visual coherence to the whole museum. The document went so far as to specify that photographs should be ‘printed on semi-gloss paper,’ an injunction passed on by members of the museum to photographers and printers. Just as the lettering and typography of

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4 / **Card of Alliance Photo**, ca. 1938

Bibliothèque centrale du Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris, 2AM1K5a

Photo: Anaïs Mauuarin

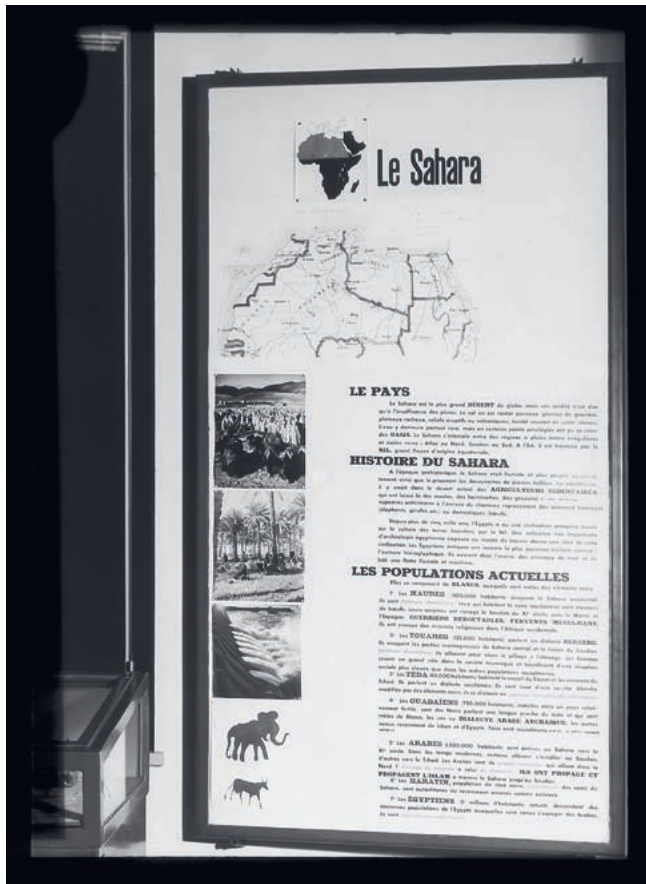
members visited the agency to look at Alliance Photo's photographic collections and select some series. They then ordered them from Maria Eisner, providing lists of plate numbers; it happened that some of the photographs were finally returned, when deemed unnecessary.

Even if studying this correspondence only gives up partial insight, as transactions between the agency and the museum were also negotiated by phone and in-person during visits, and probably also in other letters we did not find, it tells us some of the story. The photographer whose name appears most often was not surprisingly Pierre Verger, who had been close to the Trocadéro staff since the early 1930s. The references mention photographs taken in Mexico, Oceania, and more incidentally, Africa and China. René Zuber, some of whose photographs had been exhibited several years earlier, and his pictures depicting Syria, Lebanon, and Algeria were also regularly named. A photograph by Denise Bellon, taken during her trip to Morocco in 1936,<sup>34</sup> was also mentioned but does not seem to have been ordered in the end (the plate number is crossed out). She travelled around that country with Pierre Boucher, another Alliance Photo photographer. In those years Boucher was clearly interested in collaborating with the museum and spontaneously proposed to take charge of the photo laboratory.<sup>35</sup> Although his proposal was not followed up on,<sup>36</sup> his photographs of Morocco seem to have been favoured by the museum, in addition to others he had taken in Egypt and Spain. A handwritten list by Thérèse Rivière indicates that several photographs from the agency, probably ones taken by Boucher in 1939, would have been displayed in the museum's North Africa rooms, in particular on the 'Sahara' panel. [5] A historical photograph clearly allows us to identify the three images

mentioned in Rivière's list: *Chaamba Nomads and Camels* (Nomades Chaamba et chameaux), *Oasis* (Oasis), and at the bottom *The Nile* (Nil). These three roughly square photographs are tightly framed, suggesting a larger off-camera environment, and present sharp contrasts — elements that distance these photographs from traditional landscape iconography, which used wide shots to bring out the landscape's expansiveness.

Using pictures from these photographers in the permanent exhibit of the Musée de l'Homme strengthened the method of regarding photography launched some years before at the Trocadéro through their photographic exhibitions: in addition to being informative, images shown to the general public should have aesthetic qualities, which would make them formally attractive in keeping with current tastes, shaped in particular by the illustrated press.<sup>37</sup> Even if Maria Eisner granted a discount to the museum staff (by not considering the reproduction rights fees), it was more costly, in both financial and administrative terms, to use Alliance Photo's pictures rather than those from the museum's photo library.<sup>38</sup> All museum staff probably did not share this way of thinking about photographs; some showcases, such as those at the Anthropological Gallery, presented particularly outdated photographs.<sup>39</sup> However, using formally accomplished photographs appeared to be an obvious option for many of them. It even seems to have influenced the way some anthropologists considered their own visual field practices and the way they exhibited the resulting images: at the end of World War II, despite it being a troubled period for the museum, several exhibitions highlighted some ethnographers' fieldwork, and through a new design, clearly showcased their field photographs.





### Exhibiting large-format photographs by anthropologists (1941-1946)

Since the 1930s, picking a camera up in the field and taking numerous photographs was quite common for French ethnographers. Photography was part of the techniques they were encouraged to use during their training; taking photographs even appeared to be a scientific gesture; provided data was associated to resulting images.<sup>40</sup> The objects brought back to France by recent ethnographic expeditions were regularly shown at the Trocadéro in the early 1930s. In line with the photographic interests of the museum's staff, these exhibitions sometimes also displayed photographs from the field. However, the way they were presented at that time — most often in display cases, without significant emphasis — had nothing to do with the importance given to anthropologists' photographs in a series of exhibitions held at the Musée de l'Homme in the early 1940s. Despite the war and the fact that several museum members fled — such as director Paul Rivet — or were arrested, the remaining staff continued to work and organize events, including exhibitions.<sup>41</sup> Three of them — in 1941, 1943 and 1946 — were dedicated to collections acquired by and research done by scientists in the field. Photography featured prominently in them, and thus, they reshaped the way anthropologists' pictures could be displayed in

### 5 / Hugo Paul Herdeg, *Panneaux généralités, le Sahara, Musée de l'Homme (general information panels)*, 1939

silver positive on glass plate, 8,5 × 10 cm  
Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, PV0071266  
Photo © RMN – Grand Palais / Hugo Paul Herdeg

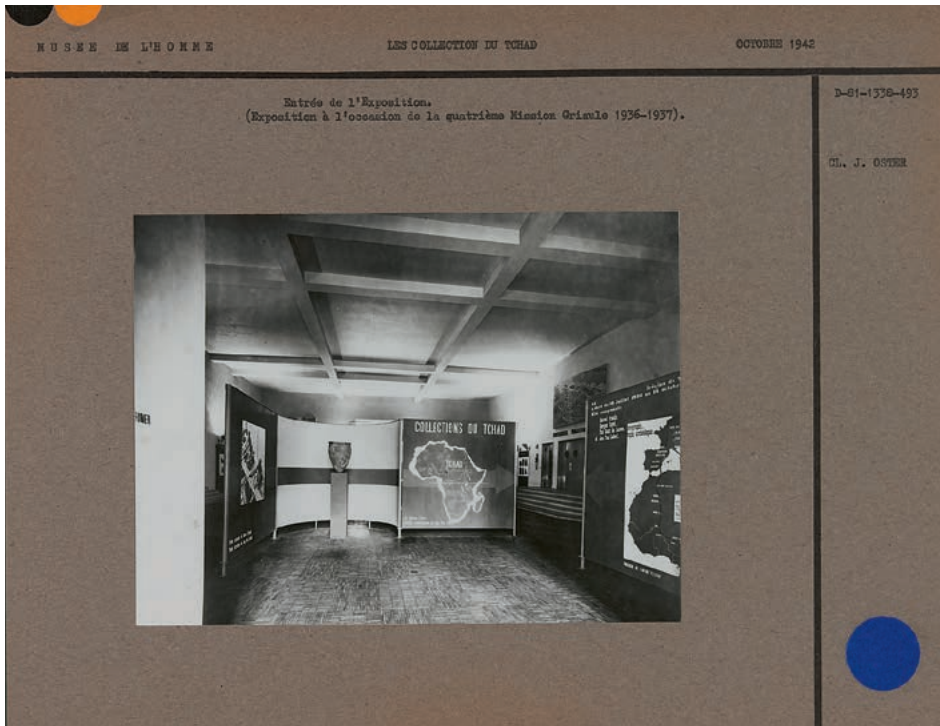
museum settings and blurred the boundaries between the scientific, pedagogic, and aesthetic values associated with them. My description of these exhibitions in the following paragraphs is based on period installation views.<sup>42</sup>

The *Collections du Tchad* exhibition opened in 1941 and was organized under the supervision of anthropologist and archaeologist Jean-Paul Lebeuf. Focusing on Chad, the exhibition relied on materials brought back by two scientific expeditions in which he participated, the fourth 'mission Griaule' (1936–37) and the 'mission Lebaudy-Griaule' (1938–39).<sup>43</sup> Many of the photographs displayed were taken by Lebeuf. They were presented in three distinct ways in the exhibition. Small ones were set up in showcases next to the displayed objects. Other medium-sized photographs were mounted in a series on a large white panel several metres long. There, visual sequences could be presented: some of Lebeuf's photographs showing the burial of a Fali hunter step by step were placed one after the other on the panel, in front of a showcase exhibiting objects related to the same topic. In addition to this unusual way of showing photographs in the museum, very large-format photographs were also displayed throughout the exhibition. At the entrance, to the left of a vase and a map that greeted the visitor, was hung a large photograph taken by Lebeuf. [6] It shows men working in the water, photographed with undeniably aesthetic attention: Lebeuf took a low-angle snapshot built around an invisible oblique line, which gives it dynamism. The other large-format photographs were put up overhead, above the showcases, overlooking the exhibition space. [7] In addition to presenting aerial views, they also showed individuals, some of whose faces appeared close-up.

Some innovative scenography elements, such as the curved picture rail and panels, had already been used in previous exhibitions, including *Le voyage de la Korrigane en Océanie* in 1938 (June–October),<sup>44</sup> but without such a substantial use of photographs. The larger ones displayed in the *Collections du Tchad* exhibition were also of a much greater size than the photographs in the permanent exhibitions — the size of which was indicated in the instructions mentioned above. The idea of using photography to such an extent initially came from Lebeuf, who designed the exhibition. He had focused on photographing in the field for years and probably saw this exhibition as an opportunity to publicly display his pictures. His interest in photography likely came from his previous work for his family's advertising agency, where he had been in charge of taking photographs.<sup>45</sup> Besides working as a researcher, he also regularly published his photographs in journals, illustrated press, and his own

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6 / José Oster, *Entrée de l'exposition 'Collections du Tchad', Musée de l'Homme (entrance of the Collection du Tchad exhibition)*, 1941  
silver print on cardboard  
(cardboard 22,5 × 29,5 cm)  
Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac,  
PPO091422  
Photo: José Oster © musée du quai  
Branly-Jacques Chirac

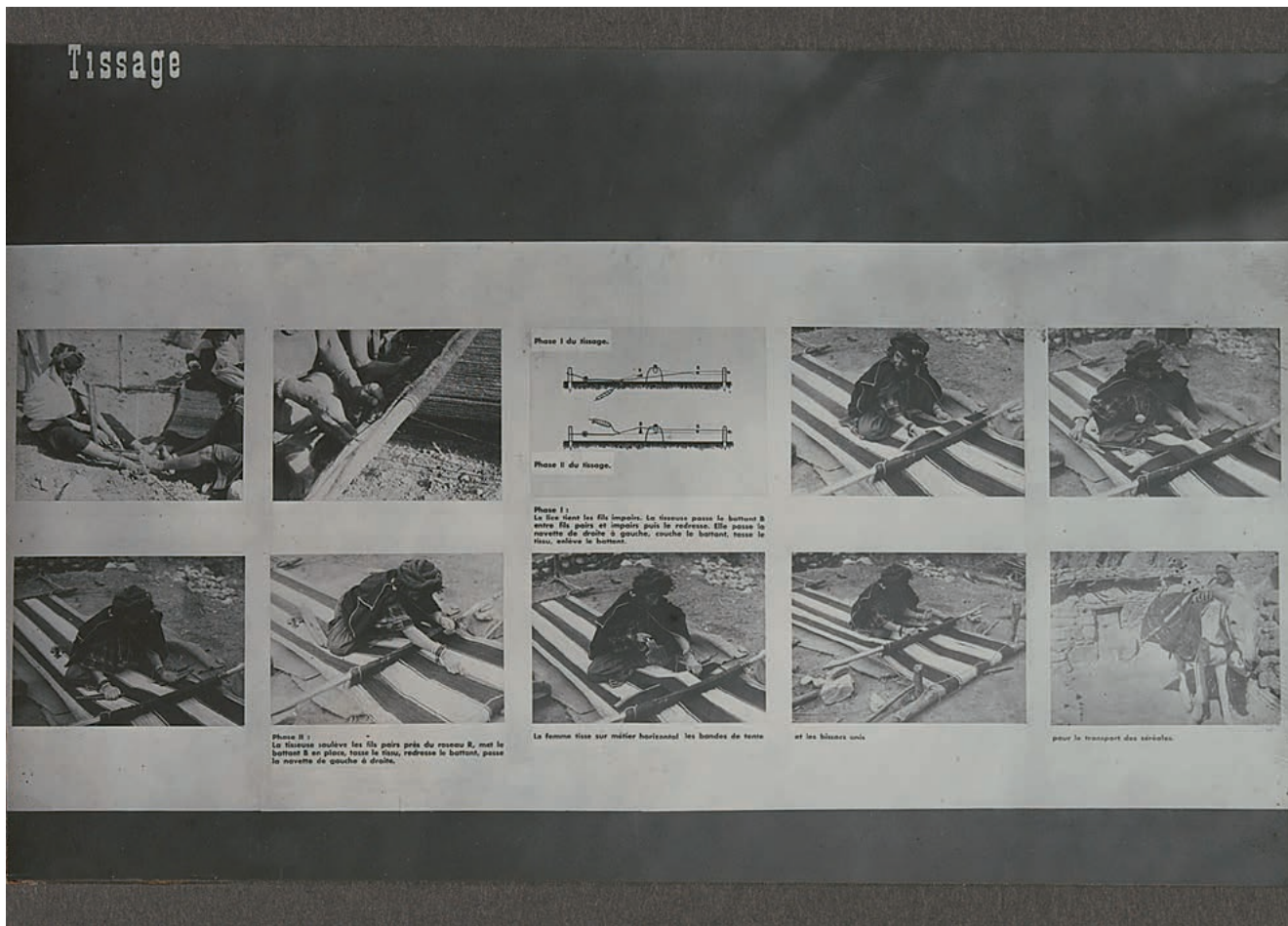
books, and used them extensively at his public lectures.<sup>46</sup> He also photographed numerous objects at the Musée de l'Homme, showing off his professional skills.<sup>47</sup> The next two exhibitions clearly followed the model of the Chad exhibition and featured photos by two anthropologists who were also very active photographers.

The layout of the *Collections de l'Aurès* exhibition, opened two years later in May 1943, used similar visual devices, including a few more photographs taken in

Algeria in 1935 by Thérèse Rivière, the already-mentioned anthropologist. It was organized by Jacques Faublée, an anthropologist and a museum collaborator close to Thérèse Rivière. Again, the images were displayed on several large white panels, hung at eye level, visually explaining specific themes and techniques, such as basketry, pottery, or weaving. [8] The showcases displaying objects were also filled with small photographs, even more than in the Chad exhibition: the images often occupied most of the space



7 / José Oster, *Vue de l'exposition 'Collections du Tchad', Musée de l'Homme (View of the Collection du Tchad exhibition)*, 1941  
silver print on cardboard  
(cardboard 22,5 × 29,5 cm)  
Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac,  
PPO091522  
Photo: José Oster © musée du quai  
Branly-Jacques Chirac



8 / Anonyme, Panneau: Le tissage dans l'Aurès, Exposition 'Collections de l'Aurès', Musée de l'Homme (Panel: Weaving in the Aurès, Collection de l'Aurès exhibition), 1943  
 silver print on cardboard (cardboard 22,5 × 29,5 cm)  
 Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, PPO091780  
 Photo © musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac

left free by the artefacts and literally surrounded them. In an innovative way, some of them were set up in the front of the showcases, and were tilted to adapt to the visitors' posture. Then, at the entrance and above the panels and showcases in the main room, as at the Lebeuf's exhibition, several large-format photographs were put up. The first image that visitors saw upon entering the exhibition was the large-format face of a Chaouia woman, who was looking at them. [9] The same portrait was used for the poster of the exhibition. Other large square photographs depicted mainly people and scenes of Auresian life. Displayed in this way, to be viewed from all over the room, they contributed to depicting and conveying an impression of the faraway place that all the collected objects exhibited below them came from and of the people to whom they belonged.

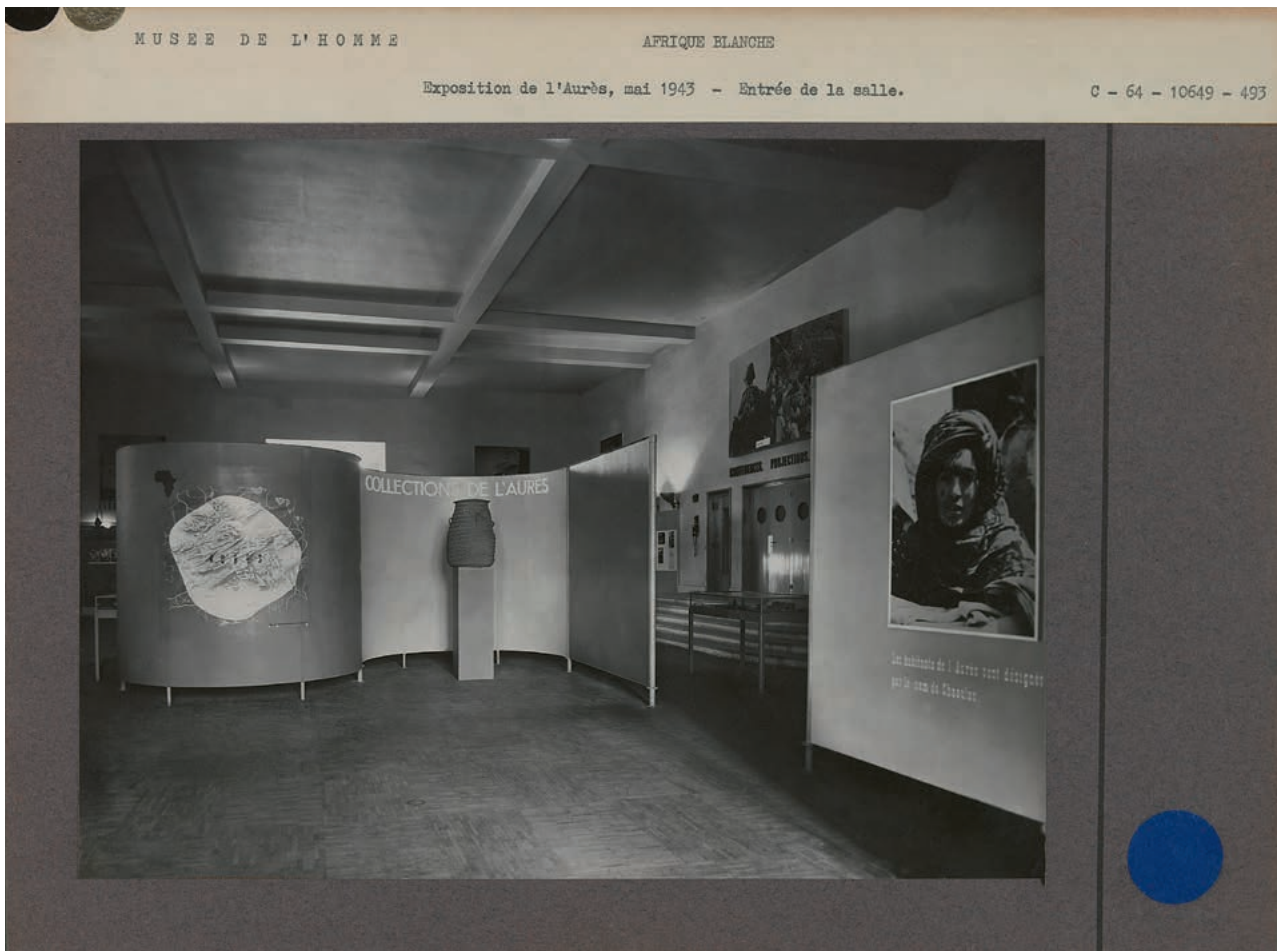
Three years later in 1946, the *Ethnographie de Madagascar* used the same combination of distinct sizes and places for photographs. It was again organized by Jacques Faublée. Besides showcases and panels where photographs by various authors were combined,<sup>48</sup> large-

format photographs were again displayed high up on the walls of the exhibition. These, which again depicted mainly individuals, had been taken by Jacques Faublée himself during his expedition to Madagascar in 1938.<sup>49</sup> The photographs appearing on the exhibition views were neatly and precisely composed, in a style less dynamic than some of Lebeuf's. One of the most compelling images depicts a man from behind walking along a path, the horizon in the distance, his shadow spreading out to the left; it seems as if he is inviting the viewer to follow him. [10]

Including large photographs in these three exhibitions was a challenging choice for the Musée de l'Homme. Archival materials related to the *Ethnographie de Madagascar* exhibition indicate that such photographs were very expensive. While small and medium-sized pictures could be printed by the museum's photographic service, the larger ones had to be made by an external supplier, which represented an additional cost. The archives show that Faublée had to limit his selection to ten prints. Nevertheless, they were still the most expensive items,<sup>50</sup>

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9 / Anonyme, Entrée de la salle 'Collections de l'Aurès', Musée de l'Homme (entrance of the Collection de l'Aurès exhibition), 1943

silver print on cardboard (cardboard 22,5 × 29,5 cm)

Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, PPO091427

Photo © musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac

costing the same amount as the installation material (paint, glue, etc.). By making this choice, the Musée de l'Homme seemed to be contributing to a reconfiguration of exhibition techniques that was inspired by advertising techniques that had developed since the end of the 1930s<sup>51</sup>. Around 1935 large-format photographs were already planned to be included in the *Secret de la mer Rouge* exhibition, mentioned above. The link to advertising was expressed more clearly in 1938 by the museum's deputy director: *We did not hesitate to use, as much as our budget allowed, the modern processes of exposure, photography, typography, and in a word, advertising.*<sup>52</sup> These techniques referred to avant-garde photography and graphic design and gave substance to a sophisticated 'communication engineering',<sup>53</sup> of which the 'photomural' was one of the distinctive features. While the avant-garde photomural could be much larger than the photographic formats adopted in the museum, the latter were part of the same dynamic of enlarging exhibited photographs.

Unlike most exhibitions using large-format photographs, the Musée de l'Homme exhibitions had

several specific features whose purpose was to stress the role of the photographer. The photographs were displayed at a distance from each other, without any visual combination of them. Even in the series presented on panels, at visitor eye level, the photographs remained side by side. Photomontage was, on the contrary, one of the characteristics of the photomural and of new visual communication devices.<sup>54</sup> In addition, each exhibition mainly displayed large-format prints of photographs taken by one anthropologist, by one photographer: Lebeuf, Rivière, or Faublée. Thus, the scenography differed significantly from that of the famous *Road to Victory* exhibition (1942) held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, well known for its innovative design that extensively used very large photographs from various sources.<sup>55</sup> [11] This was probably partly due to the fact that at the Musée de l'Homme the photographers organized the exhibitions themselves. The images were neither placed 'in the background'<sup>56</sup> nor merely informational: they were displayed as individual photographs, often carefully chosen. The staging of large-format photos



10 / René Pasquino, *Vue de l'exposition 'Ethnographie de Madagascar', Musée de l'Homme (View of the Ethnographie de Madagascar exhibition)*, 1946  
silver print on cardboard  
(cardboard 22,5 × 29,5 cm)  
Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac,  
PP0091695  
Photo: René Pasquino © musée du quai  
Branly-Jacques Chirac

taken by anthropologists, highlighting their work, seemed to suggest that the coherence of fieldwork also gave coherence to an individual photographic practice.

Through the large format, the photographs of some ethnologists thus found an important place on the walls of the Musée de l'Homme. In this way, the museum expressed the enduring attachment of ethnology to photography, to formally accomplished photographs, and to the author's status. Large format photographs did not disappear after

1946; during the 1950s and after, they grew in number and some were even hung in the museum hall.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, there was a shift in their status: they were no longer associated with the work of a particular anthropologist, as in the exhibitions mentioned above, and they no longer contributed in such an obvious way to highlighting their photographic work. Significantly, in 1961 a visitor wrote to the museum for information about a 'very large photograph [which] caught [his] attention,'<sup>58</sup> displayed facing a staircase



11 / Albert Fenn, *Road to Victory Exhibition*, May 21, 1942 – October 4, 1942  
The Museum of Modern Art Archives,  
New York, Photographic Archive, IN182.7  
Photo: The Museum of Modern Art Archives

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leading to a temporary exhibition. As ‘no indication of origin allowed [him] to identify it,’ he asked not only for the author, but also for the place it depicted. The photographs thus remained present at the museum but under a different guise: they seem to be more like illustrative images, serving as a background, instead of playing a documentary role and enhancing the photographic gesture of anthropologists.

## Conclusion

Photography found a key place in the exhibition spaces of France’s main anthropology museum from the 1930s onwards, first at the Musée d’ethnographie du Trocadéro and then at the Musée de l’Homme. The photography exhibitions organized by Paul Rivet and Georges Henri Rivière between 1932 and 1935 promoted photographs as the production of an author and made an inaugural gesture that shaped the way museum actors considered visual products for years to come. After collaborating with photographers for the opening of the Musée de l’Homme in 1937, the photographs of some anthropologists

were individually honoured in the following years. This emphasis on certain images was coupled with the use of sometimes bold scenographic innovations, such as large format printing.

The recognition of the aesthetic quality that certain images, shown to the public at the museum, could have, was however far from opposed in those years to their scientific value. On the contrary, the Trocadéro claimed that the aesthetic quality of a photograph contributed to its scientific value: that an image could be both aesthetically pleasing and scientifically relevant, and even, that the more attractive the image the more relevant its scientific content. The photographic exhibitions and displays, through their materiality and the choice of authors and images they highlighted, demonstrated a desire to align the aesthetic and scientific values of anthropological photographs. They carried with them a certain belief in the cognitive power of beautiful images, which seems to have faded since the 1950s due to the distance that French anthropology took with images and the increase in the economic and media value of photographs.

## NOTES

1 See in particular the debates published in the journal *Mouseion. Revue internationale de muséographie* since 1927.

2 Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw History: Photographs, anthropology and museums*, Oxford and New York 2001.

3 Nélia Dias, *Le Musée d’ethnographie du Trocadéro (1878-1908)*, Paris 1991.

4 Christine Laurière, ‘Georges Henri Rivière au Trocadéro. Du magasin de bric-à-brac à la sécheresse de l’étiquette’, *Gradhiva*, No. 33, 2003, pp. 57-66.

5 About contemporary practices and debates, see Elizabeth Edwards and Sigfried Lien (eds), *Uncertain Images: Museums and the Work of Photographs*, Farnham 2014.

6 Susan A. Crane, ‘The Picture in the background. History, memory and photography in the museum’, in Joan Tumblety (ed), *Memory and History: Understanding Memory as Source and Subject*, New York 2013, pp. 133-150.

7 Société des Amis du musée, *Séance du conseil d’administration du 16 juin 1929* (Bibliothèque centrale du Muséum national d’Histoire naturelle, Paris (BCM)/2AM1G2).

8 About the ‘collection paradigm’ (*paradigme de la collecte*) in French anthropology, see Benoît De L’Estoile, ‘“Une petite armée de travailleurs auxiliaires”: La division du travail et ses enjeux dans l’ethnologie française des années 1930’, *Cahiers du centre de recherche historique*, No. 36, 2005, pp. 31-59, <https://doi.org/10.4000/ccrh.3037>, 6. 2. 2022. — Vincent Debaene, ‘“Étudier des états de conscience”: La réinvention du terrain par l’ethnologie (1925-1939)’, *L’Homme*, No. 179, 2006, pp. 7-62, <https://doi.org/10.4000/lhomme.24033>, 6. 2. 2022.

9 On the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro’s photo library, see Anaïs Mauuarin, ‘La photographie multiple: Collections et circulation des

images au Trocadéro’, in André Delpuech, Christine Laurière and Carine Peltier-Caroff (eds), *Les Années folles de l’ethnographie: Trocadéro 28-37*, Paris 2017, pp. 702-710.

10 Anaïs Mauuarin, *A l’Epreuve des images. Photographie et ethnologie en France, 1930-1950*, Strasbourg 2022, pp. 53-57.

11 Carine Peltier-Caroff, ‘Les photographies d’objets au musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro’, in Delpuech, Laurière and Peltier-Caroff (note 9), pp. 277-283. — Anaïs Mauuarin, ‘Visual duplication: Specimens, works of art and photographs at the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro (1928-1935)’, *The British Journal for the History of Science LV (III)*, 2022, pp. 365-388.

12 Tony Bennett, ‘Speaking to the eyes. Museums, legibility and the social order’, in Sharon Macdonald (eds), *The Politics of Display: Museums, Science, Culture*, London and New York 1998, p. 28.

13 Nina Gorgus, *Le Magicien des vitrines*, Paris 2003.

14 Marie Durand and Anaïs Mauuarin, ‘Le chercheur-photographe et ses images de terrain. L’entreprise photographique d’Edgar Aubert de la Rüe’, *Photographica*, No. 4, 2022, pp. 98-117.

15 Georges Henri Rivière, ‘À propos de l’art nègre’, *Le Figaro esthétique*, 1931; quoted in Laurière (note 4), p. 64.

16 On various forms: in 1933, a journalist reported that, at the Trocadéro ‘we have pushed the concern for the public to the point of placing stereoscopes in certain rooms showing photographs of scenes from the life of the black peoples’. See ‘La renaissance du ME au Trocadéro’, *Le Mois*, September 1933.

17 Christian Bouqueret, *André Steiner. L’homme curieux*, Paris 1999.

18 See BCM/2AM1C1e.

19 Anaïs Mauuarin, ‘De «beaux documents» pour l’ethnologie. Les expositions de photographies du Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro (1932-1935)’, *Etudes Photographiques*, No. 33, 2015, pp. 21-41.

20 Marcel Griaule, 'Les photographies qui accompagneront le texte ne seront pas un seul prétexte au rêve, un seul agrément pour l'œil : elles auront une valeur technique indépendante [...], une valeur scientifique. Là où l'amateur ne verra qu'un cavalier bien profilé sur une dune, prêt aux galops irréels, le spécialiste détaillera le mors ou la croupière. Paisible scène champêtre pour l'un, travail agricole pour l'autre. Tableau pour l'un, référence pour l'autre.' See Archives nationales, Paris/Rectorat de Paris/Institut d'ethnologie/20010498/70-Activité scientifique, 1925-1968.

21 "Prises avec autant de soucis documentaires que réalisées avec art." See BCM/2AM1B1.

22 'Des documentaires et de véritables petits tableaux.' See Mariel Jean-Brunhes Delamarre, 'Ella Maillart', *Union nationale des femmes*, 1934, 10. 5., p. XX.

23 'Constituent des documents artistiques et ethnographiques d'un incomparable intérêt.' See Pierre Malo, 'Au Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro, peuples et magies de l'océan Indien', *L'Homme libre*, 1934, 14. 6., p. 1.

24 Christine Laurière, Paul Rivet. *Le savant et le politique*, Paris 2008. — Claude Blanckaert (ed), *Le musée de l'Homme. Histoire d'un musée laboratoire*, Paris 2015.

25 Elizabeth Edwards and Christopher Morton (eds), *Photographs, Museums, Collections: Between Art and Information*, London and New York 2015. — Eléonore Challine, *Une histoire contrariée. Le musée de photographie en France (1839-1945)*, Paris 2018.

26 Anonymous/Unknown author, *Instruction pour la présentation des collections*, 9<sup>th</sup> February 1938 (BCM/2AM1I2).

27 Mauuarin (note 10), p. 180.

28 Eadem, 'Photographs playing against type. The Ambiguities of the Human Races Gallery of the Museum of Man (1938)', Conference *Photo: Science. Photography and Scientific Discourses*, Centrum pro výzkum fotografie, Institute of Art, the Czech Academy of Science, Prague, 30. 11.-2. 12. 2020 (unpublished paper).

29 Thomas Michael Gunther and Marie de Thézy, *Alliance photo : Agence photographique 1934-1940*, Paris 1988.

30 See BCM/2AM1K5a.

31 Gorgus (note 13). — Martine Segalen, *Vie d'un musée, 1937-2005*, Paris 2005.

32 Fanny Colonna and Thérèse Rivière, *Aurès/Algérie, 1935-1936. Photographies*, Alger and Paris 1987. — Christian Phéline, *Aurès, 1935. Photographies de Thérèse Rivière et Germaine Tillion*, Vanves 2018.

33 See Mauuarin (note 9).

34 Anaïs Mauuarin, 'Le quartier réservé de Casablanca sous l'œil de Denise Bellon', in Jean-François Staszak (ed), *Quartier réservé. Bousbir, Casablanca*, Genève 2020.

35 Boucher said, 'I am writing to let you know that I would eventually be happy to run it [the photo laboratory of the museum] and that I am therefore applying for this position as a photographer.' See letter from Pierre Boucher to the director (Musée de l'Homme), 11<sup>th</sup> July 1938 (BCM/2AM1I2c).

36 The Musée de l'Homme had an agreement with the photographer Henri Tracol for several years. See Mauuarin (note 10), pp. 176-189.

37 Mauuarin (note 10), pp. 152-165.

38 There is no doubt that the photo library held photographs from the Sahara. In addition to nineteenth-century photographs from the Laboratoire d'Anthropologie du Muséum national d'histoire naturelle, which were added to the photo library of the Musée de l'Homme from 1938, the photo library also included photographs taken in 1929 by Lucien Cochain during his mission to Morocco and those of Thérèse Rivière

taken in the Aurès in 1935. In addition, the collection also includes documentation assembled on the occasion of the Sahara exhibition organized at the Trocadéro in 1934.

39 This made the gallery's discourse particularly problematic: along with skulls, there were photographs taken at the time of the Anthropology Laboratory, i.e., in the nineteenth century, to illustrate the so-called races and types. Mauuarin (note 28).

40 Mauuarin (note 10), p. 49.

41 Daniel Fabre, 'L'ethnologie française à la croisée des engagements (1940-1945)', in Jean-Yves Boursier (ed), *Résistants et résistance*, Paris and Montréal 1997. — Christine Laurière, '1938-1949: Un musée sous tension', in Blanckaert (note 24)

42 Initially included in the photographic library of the Musée de l'Homme, they are today kept in the photographic collections of the Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, which are available online: <http://collections.quaibrany.fr>.

43 Jean-Paul Lebeuf, *Les Collections du Tchad : Guide pour leur exposition*, Paris 1941.

44 Fabrice Grognet, 'Le nouveau Musée de l'Homme et l'exposition de 1938', in Christian Coiffier (ed), *Le voyage de La Korrigane dans les mers du Sud*, Paris 2001, pp. 44-47.

45 Éric Jolly, 'Jean-Paul Lebeuf. Formation et aspiration au voyage', *A la Naissance de l'Ethnologie Française. Les Missions Ethnographiques en Afrique Subsaharienne (1928-1939)*, See [http://naissanceethnologie.fr/exhibits/show/jean-paul\\_lebeuf/formation-aspiration-voyage#footnote\\_anchor\\_1](http://naissanceethnologie.fr/exhibits/show/jean-paul_lebeuf/formation-aspiration-voyage#footnote_anchor_1), 6. 2. 2022.

46 Mauuarin (note 10), pp. 226-234.

47 See the photographic collections of the Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac (note 42).

48 See BCM/2AM1C4b.

49 Majan Garlinski and Eve Hopkins (eds), *A Madagascar. Photographies de Jacques Faublée, 1938-1941*, Genève 2010. The photographs taken during this expedition are mainly kept in the Musée d'Ethnographie de Genève.

50 The ten prints cost 80.000 francs, out of a total of 387.000 francs (BCM/2AM1C4b).

51 Marie-Emmanuelle Chessel, *La publicité. Naissance d'une profession, 1900-1940*, Paris 1998.

52 Jacques Soustelle, 'Le Musée de l'Homme, laboratoire et musée', *Science. L'Encyclopédie annuelle*, No. 27, 1938, p. 5.

53 Olivier Lugon, 'Avant la forme «tableau». Le grand format photographique dans l'exposition «Signs of Life» (1976)', *Etudes Photographiques*, No. 25, 2010, pp. 6-41.

54 Brenda Lynn Edgar, *Le motif éphémère: Ornement photographique et architecture au XXe siècle*, Rennes 2021.

55 A large literature has been devoted to this exhibition; we would mention as fully illustrated sources: Edwards Steichen (ed), *Road to Victory: A Procession of Photographs of the Nation at War*, New York 1942. — Herbert Bayer, 'Aspects of Design of Exhibitions and Museums', *Curator*, No. 3, 1961.

56 Susan A. Crane, 'The Picture in the background. History, memory and photography in the museum', in Joan Tumblety (ed), *Memory and History: Understanding Memory as Source and Subject*, New York 2013, pp. 133-150.

57 Christelle Patin, 'Le musée vivant face au défi de l'éducation populaire', in Blanckaert (note 25), p. 217.

58 Letter from A. Capart to Monsieur le Conservateur, 10 March 1961 (BCM/2AM1K19c).